



A GERMAN PROFESSOR at Texas Tech University, Dr. Meredith McClain will receive a prestigious German award, the Lucius D. Clay Medal. She was nominated by the Wilhelmshaven/Friesland German American Association for her efforts in improving the friendship between Germans and Americans.

A lifetime fascination with Deutschland's culture

Ever since she was a child in Georgetown, Meredith McClain has been intrigued with the charm and spirit of Germans.



DURING THE FIRST of Dr. McClain's Winnetours, the city of Lubbock held a reception for the German guests and presented them all with authentic Texan red bandanas. Dr. McClain said the group had been stuck at the airport in Dallas for hours prior to their arrival in Lubbock because of tornadoes. The Germans didn't mind the wait, however. They were fascinated by the Texas weather they had read about in their Karl May books.

By AMY COX
Meredith McClain's fascination with Germans started during her youth in Georgetown.

She remembers spending afternoons as a high school student learning her first German words in her teacher Mrs. Solomon's farmhouse before German courses were even offered at Georgetown High School.

Every Sunday her family's German neighbors, Lutz and Margaret Merzbach, who moved to America with their daughter Uta after a terrible experience in a German prison camp, would hold authentic German *Kaffeeklatsch*, or afternoon coffee at their home and invite the McClain family. On special holidays, Dr. McClain's parents, Rosamond and Will Kelly McClain, along with Meredith and her brother Martin, would share in German-style meals with the Merzbachs, who would serve dinner on rare silver and blue German china.

These experiences left a lasting impression on Dr. McClain, now 59, and a German professor at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, and director of the Southwest Center for German Studies.

"It's amazing thinking about growing up in Georgetown, I was studying German, and doing all these very German things," she said.

Life's Study

Dr. McClain's early fascination with Germans living in Georgetown led her to a life's study of the German language and culture. Most recently she has focused on the work of bestselling German author

Karl May and the German version of the myth of the American West.

But her appreciation of German culture may only begin to approach the impression she has left across an ocean in Germany.

More than 40 years after her first *Kaffeeklatsch* and German lesson, Dr. McClain will accept a prestigious German award, the Lucius D. Clay Medal in Düsseldorf, Germany on October 6, which is German-American Day in Germany. She was nominated by the Wilhelmshaven/Friesland German American Association for her efforts in improving the friendship between Germans and Americans.

"It was a great surprise and wonderful honor," Dr. McClain said. "In many ways it's the highest award I could get in the world for the kind of work I've done. It's like a Pulitzer."

The Lucius D. Clay Medal has been awarded annually to either Germans or Americans since 1980. Presented by the Federation of German American Clubs, it is the highest honor awarded for initiating or deepening German-American relations.

General Clay was deputy to General Dwight D. Eisenhower from 1945 to 1947 and military governor of the U.S. occupation zone in Germany during the Soviet Union's blockade of the western zones. He helped initiate the airlift run by the western occupation forces, and was later named President John Kennedy's personal advisor for Berlin.

Past winners of the Clay award have included a U.S. Ambassador to Germany, a U.S. Congressman and a German President. Dr. McClain is the first female repre-

senting a university to receive the award.

Bringing Everyone Together

Her successes in bringing Americans and Germans together are many. She taught East German English after reunification in 1990, established one of the first American University German language summer programs for U.S. students in former East Germany, lectured on her studies to many German audiences, and served as state chair of the Texas-Germany Sesquicentennial Committee from 1985-1986.

An accomplished flautist, Dr. McClain has also performed in numerous German venues. Several of her exhibits have also toured in the Central Texas area.

But her recent work about the immensely popular German author Karl May, who lived from 1842 to 1912, is perhaps her most publicized accomplishment.

Although Karl May visited the United States only once, never stepping foot in the West, he wrote 80 fantasy novels chronicling the adventures of "Old Shatterhand," a German frontiersman and "Winnetou," a Mescalero Apache chieftain, set in the Llano Estacado region which includes Dr. McClain's current home in Lubbock.

"It's the most successful form of travel fantasy that any European has come up with," Dr. McClain said. "Karl May got so famous so fast. He fell into the trap some rock stars have fallen into - fantasizing what the public fantasizes about."

Her interest in Karl May began quite accidentally about 20 years ago at a Fulbright conference in

Germany. Introducing herself to a room full of Germans, Dr. McClain drew little response after reporting that she hailed from Lubbock. But when she happened to mention that Lubbock was part of the Llano Estacado, she sparked a sudden interest in the audience.

"It was a major, unexpected, total surprise. Well the Germans kind of sat up in their chairs," she said. "I couldn't believe it, I didn't know what I'd said. They started asking me all this history I didn't know about, and I was so embarrassed."

Soon enough, Dr. McClain found out that for Germans living in Karl May's day to the present, his works had provoked a profound interest in the semi-arid Texas Panhandle, stereotypically uninteresting to many Americans. But Karl May's stories of the Llano Estacado, which also includes parts of New Mexico, were sometimes more than slightly exaggerated.

Fascination with Texas

"Texas was a bigger concept in Germany in the 1850s and 1860s than we can imagine," she said. "Texas had just become a republic in 1836 and in the 1840s and 1850s Germans started coming to the Hill Country."

Intrigued by the Germans' fascination, Dr. McClain began attending meetings of the Karl May International Society, and she is currently working on a book about him.

During the past decade, she has organized tours of the Llano Estacado region for today's German Karl May enthusiasts. She has dubbed the Greyhound bus tours, "Winnetours," in honor of Karl

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Germans are fascinated by Texas

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May's fictional Mescalero Apache chieftain. Numerous Germans have come eagerly in pursuit of his fantasyland.

The Germans arrive in the Dallas area, stopping by the Kennedy Memorial Museum, Billy Bob's Texas and the Fort Worth Stockyards before moving on to Lubbock. After spending about five days touring Texas Tech University

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DR. MEREDITH MCCLAIN

and the Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock, the group heads to Ruidoso, Santa Fe, Taos and Albuquerque.

"They have such a good time," she says, but compared to the grandiosity presented in Karl May's stories, confronting the reality of the life and landscape of the Southwest can sometimes be difficult for her visitors.

"I think sometimes they would like to hold on to the romantic view they grew up with," she said. "For each one that comes, there must be 300 that don't want to come. They don't want to come and find out what it's like."

Dr. McClain recalls one occasion when one of the touring groups was traveling in a bus over the Pecos River and adamantly demanded to

stop. Karl May's stories have been converted into several movies, and in one filmed in Yugoslavia, the Pecos is presented as a huge river accompanied by a large waterfall.

When the Germans took a closer look at the real Pecos, they were shocked not to find a blue oasis complete with a waterfall.

"They said, 'This is the Pecos River?'" Dr. McClain said. "I have to replace this balloon that's been burst for them. But that's very much to the heart of what I'm doing. As a professor it's very different to get to work with people's fantasies - to fill them with reality, which is so interesting and is really so profound."

Despite the many gaps between Karl May's Llano Estacado and Dr. McClain's Llano Estacado, the Germans seem to have an overall positive experience when visiting, she says. In fact, some have taken the Winnetour more than once.

"Nobody likes to go [to the panhandle] everybody calls it the armpit of Texas," she said. "But it turned into something wonderful."

And to think it all started in Georgetown, not part of the Llano Estacado and a place many Germans have likely never heard of. But Dr. McClain still thinks back on her introduction to German culture at those special dinners at the Merzbachs.

"The conversation was always very lively, centered on world affairs, politics, history and literature, and I was always amazed at how much my brother knew and how little I seemed to know," she said. "All in all this introduction to a very cultured atmosphere of fine Sherry in thin crystal glasses served in a room surrounded with bookcases and floors covered with multiple oriental rugs made a lasting and very positive impression on me."